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ABSTRACT

Three short stories and one song are to be used as part of the social studies unit, The Aleuts of the Eighteenth Century, to give an idea of the nature and uses of Aleutian folklore. Most have simple plots and teach something about proper behavior. "A Sparrow Story," told by an Aleut woman who lived in Unalaska, relates the story of an unfaithful husband whose wife learns of his wrongdoing from a sparrow. The wife kills both the husband and his lover, then dies from worrying and thinking about her husband. "There Once Live a Man" tells of a man whose wife goes to the chief's house while the man is away. When he returns and learns of this, he beheads the chief and his own wife, hangs the heads on the chief's boat stand, and keeps such a long vigil that his birdskin coat rots. Finally, he weeps remorsefully. "Chuning, the Ancestress of the Attuans" describes the history of the Attu people. The woman Chuning survives an attack by men from the east and is found later by other men from an eastern island. She has a child by them, but dies before it grows up. Because of this, the original Attu language is lost. "A Song of the Atkan Aleut" tells of a young man's unsuccessful attempt to hunt a sea lion. The Aleut version and word-for-word translations are included. (AV)

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Selections from

ALEUT FOLKLORE

Book V

The Aleuts of the Eighteenth Century
Social Studies Unit

SO 009 366

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About this Story

This is a traditional Aleut folktale, related here as it was told by Mrs. Anfesia Shapsnikoff, and recorded on tape in a joint project conducted by the Alaska Library Association, Alaska Federation of Natives, and the Tanana Chiefs Conference in 1972-73.

There are many versions of this story, and all versions teach something about the proper way to behave and what might happen if a person does not behave in that proper way.

Mrs. Shapsnikoff was a learned woman and a well-known weaver of exquisite Aleut baskets. She was born on Atka Island and spent most of her life in Unalaska. She died in 1973.

A SPARROW STORY

as told by Anfesia Shapsnikoff

1973

Once upon a time there was a sparrow. It was told that the sparrow was able to talk and explain things because it flew all around and so knew everything that was happening. It was good to make friends with it.

Now there lived a woman and a daughter and a husband. And every now and then the husband would go out and fish or go out and hunt.

It happens there was another woman also, one who lived up at the head of the bay under a cliff.

Now as time went by, the wife noticed that her husband would be gone for unusually long periods of time, and he always went in the direction of the cliff. The wife would wonder at this every now and then and let it go at that.

One morning when the husband hadn't been home for some time, the wife was doing her chores inside, when her daughter, who had been playing outside, came running in. She said, in a puzzled voice, "Mother, I heard a sparrow talking and it was saying something that I didn't quite understand. Maybe you could. . ."

"What would a sparrow say?" her mother interrupted her. "They don't say or do anything!"

"But this one did, Mother, this sparrow did!" the daughter insisted. "It was telling us something we should know -- something it wanted to say!"

"Oh, sparrows don't talk! I don't understand what you're talking about!" the mother answered.

So the daughter went back outside and started playing again. But the sparrow came back and started to chirp at her louder than ever. So the girl ran inside and pleaded with her mother,

"Come, Mother, and listen to this sparrow. It's talking again!"

So the mother went out and listened to the sparrow. It told her about seeing a man up in the head of the bay, a man who went to see a woman who lived there under a cliff. And as soon as it said that it flipped its wings and flew away.

The woman went back inside and went about her work until she was finished. Then she fixed herself up, put her mukluks on, and took her walking stick and went to visit this woman who lived under the cliff.

When she got to the head of the bay, she saw the woman looking out into the bay. The wife looked out too and saw what she thought was an object out

there. The other woman pretended she wasn't paying attention to it.

Instead, she called to the wife, saying, "Why don't you come in and join me? I have a real nice pot of stew that we could eat together."

"No, I didn't come to eat," the wife answered tersely. "I came here to see if my husband would be coming ashore."

The woman said, "No, that's not a boat out there. That's just a reef where the mussels grow. Every time there's a low tide, why it shows. It's not a boat. Come on in and join me!"

"No, I don't think I want any. I want to watch for my husband. No, I think it <u>is</u> a boat," the wife insisted.

"No, it's not! I told you that it's not, because that reef has been out there for a long time." The woman who lived in the cliff was becoming very angry, but she softened her voice as she coaxed,

"Come on in and join me and share this nice pot of stew that I have."

So finally the wife went into the woman's barabara and looked in the stew pot and saw that it was a nice, hot stew -- boiling hot. She bent over it and pretended that she was tasting it. Then she lifted her head up out of the pot and asked,

"How do you eat this, anyway?"

And the woman went over to the pot and said, "I always eat it like this." And she picked up her spoon and stuck her head over the pot and started eating it.

As she was standing there with her head over the pot, the wife pushed her head down and held it inside the boiling stew until the woman was scalded to death. Then she took the woman's body outside to where the landing gear of the bidarki stood and faced her toward the bay, propping her up on the gear so that it looked like she was

sitting there.

Then the wife hid away. From her hiding place she saw the boat coming into shore and she recognized that the man inside was her husband. He pulled his boat onto the beach and she heard his voice saying,

"Oh, you're always up there waiting for me, and so I try to hurry. But the tide wasn't right today and so I couldn't come home until now." And he pulled his boat up further and came running over to the dead woman and put his arms around her. As he hugged her the body fell over and he fell on top of it. He realized that she was dead and so he turned around to go back to his boat. His wife came out of her hiding place then and said angrily,

"So this is what you've been doing! The sparrow had to tell me about it! I came looking for you. Now I'm going to kill you because I thought you had been lost and died when all along

you were planning to live with this woman! Well, I'm not going to give you a chance to do that!"

With that she threw him into the bay and drowned him. And then she turned around and went home. And she died from worrying and thinking of her husband.

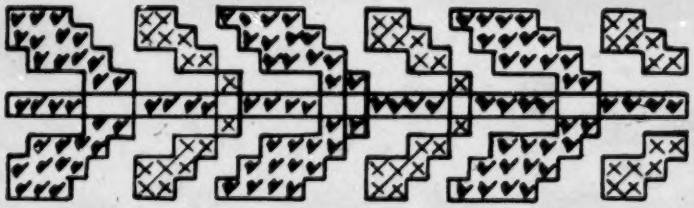
And this was all told by that sparrow.

About this Story

This story, like the last, is a traditional Aleut folktale, and was told to instruct people in proper modes of behavior. It may have been based on an actual occurrence.

This version was translated by Professor Knut Bergsland, reworked by Patricia Partnow.

It was used with permission of the American Philosophical Society, and originally published in Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Volume 49, Part 3, 1959.



THERE ONCE LIVE A MAN

from the Aleut version told by Savely Prokopyev,

Attu 1910

There once lived a man. His wife told him she wanted seal meat to eat. So he went out to get some.

While he was gone, his wife was called to the house of Saadax̂ the chief. Although her husband's mother told her she shouldn't go into the house, she went there anyway.

Her two children kept the mother-in-law sleepless that night. When day came, her son arrived home from his hunting trip. He did not see his wife, so he asked his mother where she was. His mother, having been disturbed by both her grandchildren all night, told him,

"After you left, she was called to Saadax̂'s house. I didn't want to let her go there, but she went anyway!"

The son, after sharpening his knife, entered Saadax̂'s house, reached for him and cut off his head. Then he cut off his wife's head and knotted their hair together. He hung the heads up on Saadax̂'s skin boat stand. Then the man climbed Saadax̂'s observation hill and began what would be a long stay on the hilltop.

Seeing that the people were afraid, seeing those two corpses, he stayed on top of the hill. When he finally stood up, the lower part of his

birdskin coat fell off, rotten.

He finally descended the hill, going out to where he had covered the seals he had hunted. When he reached the seals, seeing only bones and hair, he thought how they had become like his wife. Thinking that he had been too jealous, he began to cry.

About this Story

This is a legend, a tale which describes the history of the Attu people. It was passed [illegible] for generations to Attu children so that they would know who they were and what their background was.

This version was translated into English by Professor Knut Bergsland, reworked by Patricia Partnow.

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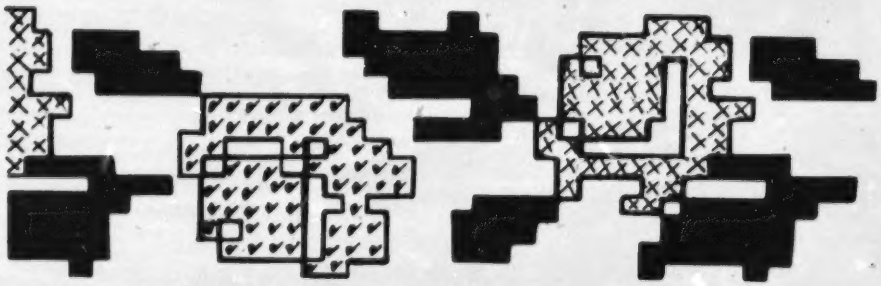

CHUNING, THE ANCESTRESS OF THE ATTUANS

from the Aleut version told by Mike Lokanin,

Atka 1952

There were three places: Attu and Agattu an the Semichi Islands. At all three of them there were many people, but then there came men from the east in bidarkis, making war, killing the people there, destroying all of them until only two young men and one woman, Chuning by name, were left.

Now Chuning told her two companions that she was going to hide. Then Chuning hid.

After she had hidden herself, both her fellow survivors were found and killed. Now that they were gone she was left by herself.

She was there on Attu Island. She walked around the island three times, but didn't see a single other person. So, she made a village for herself on the northwest side of Attu: one big house all for herself. And she stayed there. She fed herself by killing a male sea-lion: she rolled rocks onto it, she later told.

While she was there alone she made pets of a young sea gull and a young female eider duck. She used to watch them fight each other, laughing at them. She had nothing else to laugh at, she said. She also tried to keep a land bug as a pet, but became too lousy and so gave it up. After she had been found, when she told stories, she told this one too.

The men in bidarkis who had made war and destroyed the Attu people then went to Agattu and killed the Agattu people. Then, from there, they went east.

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After several years had passed, men again came from the east. From Umnak Island, a baidar came to Attu. It circled the island, but the men didn't see anyone until they reached the village called Hanilix. There they found Chuning, sitting on a log, chipping away at it. They went up close to her but they didn't want to frighten her so one of the men lightly touched the end of her log. She felt the end of her log being touched and she turned her head and said,

"Oh! I'm going to see a man at last!"

She had not seen a man since she had been left alone.

And she began to live together with the men. And Chuning had a child by them. But before Chuning's child became big, his mother died.

And although Chuning's son tried to speak his mother's former language, he could not speak it correctly; he could not pronounce the deep words. And from then on the language of the Attu people has been different.

About this Song

This song was sung by a person who is preparing to dance. We have no information to tell us at what type of gathering the song would be sung. However, we can imagine that the setting might have been a winter festival, one to which Aleuts from neighboring villages had been invited for feasting, entertainment, and a chance to see distant relatives and begin new friendships.

At the end of the song the performer stops singing and the men sitting around in the barabara begin to beat their drums and sing. Then the performer starts to dance, acting out the song.

The English version printed here was originally translated by Professor Knut Bergsland and reworked by Richard Dauenhauer. The following pages show first the Aleut version and then Bergsland's word-for-word translations.

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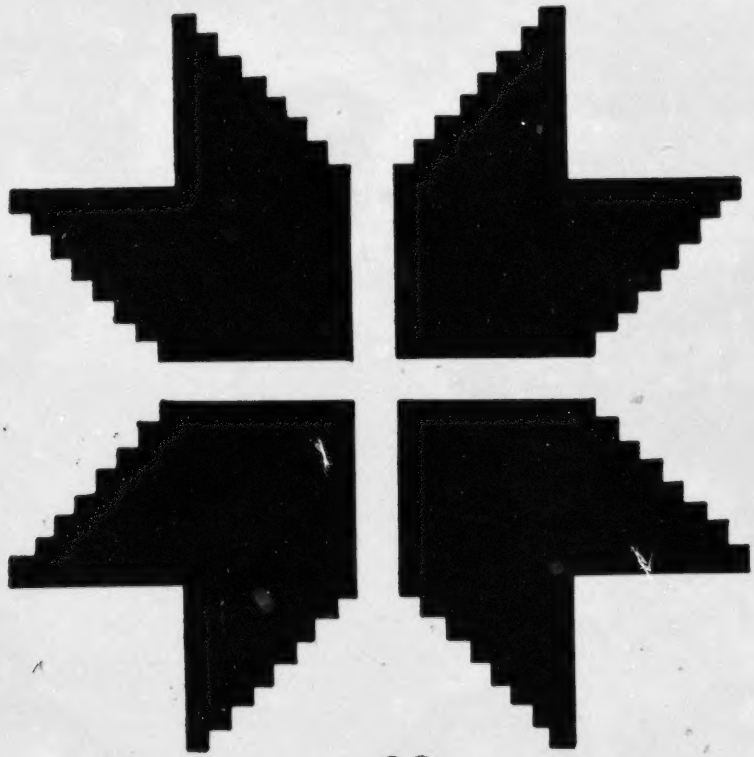

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A SONG OF THE ATKAN ALEUT

from the Aleut version originally recorded

by Iakov Netzvetov, Atka, early 1800's

It was something
anyone could do.
Nothing special,
so today
I slipped away to hunt.

I paddled along,
looking around,
and saw an animal,
a sea lion,
rising joyfully
to the surface.

I stopped in front of him.
I thought

"nothing special,
anyone can do it"

and thinking
that I could kill him too
I pulled a spear from the strapping
on my bidarki stern.

Paddling toward him,
getting close to him,
I speared him.
But it didn't penetrate.

Suddenly
he dived away.

I paddled after him,
I shot at him
again and again
but only lost
my spear points.

To see no one
I had slipped away on purpose;
I looked around for someone
but in vain.

If there'd been
one with whom to cry
I would have felt like crying.

After having drifted for a while
I paddled off,
to get back home.
Getting back,
I landed.

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My ears were tuned
for the sound of drumming,
for the one I love
above all else,
for the one I think
I'm a master of:
the drum.

I did not hear it sounding
but I knew
you must be there
and there you are!

Take up the drums,
open up your mouths
and sing!

SONG OF THE ATKAN ALEUTS

as recorded by Iakov Netzvetov

(1) Mayamulax madangis maangan waaga ting aĝusix, ayuxsix angaliqingaan,

(2) haladalix iqyaĝihlikuqingaan, algax̂ qawax̂ inix̂sinax̂ qasadaasalix aygaxtax̂takux̂ ukux̂talix,

(3) angadan ting hanikasix an'gilakalinaqing,

(4) mayaĝulax ax̂tagalim manaaĝnatxin maasahliikalka anuxtalix,

(5) manaaĝnaning mahliidaqing anuxtaasalix iqyang ukangan hangadagaan uĝalux̂ idgisix, qigaslilix achidalix,

(6) ngaan ting iqyaĝisxa, ilagaan aĝalka uĝalux̂tagalikung, uĝalux̂ ilan changatlakanka akung,

(7) txin hatangnil amangus aĝakux̂,

(1) The undaring's / deeds / to do, / from here,/ myself / hiding, / when I went out today,

(2) looking around / as I was paddling along, / an animal, / a sea lion / joyfully / rising to the surface / that went, / seeing,

(3) in front of him / stopping // I started to think:

(4) undaring / who even is, / his plan / himself to be able to carry out on him / expecting,

(5) my plan / that I would carry out / expecting, / of my kayak / of the stern / from the top / a spear / pulling out (from under the cross straps), / unsheathing, / putting in front,

(6) at him / paddling, // at him / getting, / although I speared him, / the spear / into him / as I had not made enter,

(7) suddenly // away as he got,

(8) agalagaan iqyaĝilix, uĝaludaaĝdagalikung, anaĝis maasalakanka inimaan uĝaluningiin kadaliisalka,

(9) ukuuĝing alagaaχta taaman ting aĝusix ayuglaasaχ akuqingaan,

(10) kiin ukuungan halaasaaĝdagalilix aaĝalix,

(11) asix qidaaĝing aguu kuma, qidahliidaχ liidaχ tutalix,

(12) haangus hanikaqadaaming, tanaanuungan ting iqyaĝisix, tanaanulix chalakuqingaan,

(13) hamakux agatikix qaĝaχtalkix, qugaasanang anuxtadaking, chaayax ikin tutusik agitalix aaĝalix, tununakix tutalakan,

(14) hingaya malgahlilix anuxtaangan aχtakuning malix haangus aχtakuχtxichix waya.

(15) Alix chaayachix sulix agiiχtxichix a way.

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(8) after him/ paddling/ although I was throwing spears at him,/ anything/ not doing to him,/ in vain / of my spears / spoiling the points at him,

(9) to see nobody // precisely, / myself / hiding, / I had gone out,

(10) somebody / to see / although looking round, doing it in vain,

(11) with/ whom to cry I / if had had,/ crying anyway / like / feeling,

(12) there/ after having lain still, / to go back / paddling off, // going back / when I landed,

(13) [to] that,/ in particular / loving, / that I am a devil (a past-master) at/ I think,/ the drum/ to,/ my ears / opening/ in vain,/ it sounding/ not hearing,

(14) there,/ to be still there/ whom I had thought, // so / there / you are, / behold.

(15) But / your drums / taking / open up your mouths, / heigh.

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